



PREVIEW

A Bunch of Amateurs

+ Q&A with director Kim Hopkins, producer Margareta Szabo and special guests from the Bradford Movie Makers

Director's Statement

A Bunch of Amateurs is set in Bradford in the north of England, in an area where outsiders are treated with eyebrow raising suspicion, and those wielding a camera are outright cold shouldered. I was raised here, so I understand the local codes, working-class sensibilities and the tough history. The ghosts of a prosperous industrial past are everywhere, but Bradford is now one of the poorest cities in Europe. These working-class folks are the collateral damage of an ideologically split society that at best ignores them, at worst somehow holds them responsible. Here, comedy has a very serious function – to ward off the devil, be that devil sadness, loneliness or the Grim Reaper himself. Laughter is a sort of survival mechanism to get you through the bad times. They are good, honest people, the so called 'salt of the earth'. It is these sentiments that I wanted at the heart of *A Bunch of Amateurs*.

I had to immerse myself wholly into the world of these characters. I decided on an old-school character-driven verité approach with a handheld cinema camera fluidly following subjects so that an intimate portrait and storylines would emerge without need of commentary or other story devices. Some scenes would be filmed by the characters themselves. Footage from the Club's archive, dating back to the 1930s, along with excerpts of subjects' own movies provide a varied texture and historical sweep.

A whimsical tongue-in-cheek tone and playful editing are intended to hook the audience on a slightly absurdist journey where we ponder more and more on why anyone makes a film in the first place. Why ordinary Joe aspires to be an artist in an anti-art culture?

The story of *A Bunch of Amateurs* centres not only on the love and magic of the cinema, but on the ritual of gathering to watch movies together under one roof. As Walter Murch writes: 'Humans have been assembling in the dark, listening to stories, since the invention of language. It is indelibly part of who we are and how we bond with each other. The theatrical experience is a recreation of this primeval gathering, the flames of the campfire replaced by shifting images that are telling the story itself.' And in a moment when we have all tasted what it feels like to be isolated, marginalised, vulnerable, and also impoverished, *A Bunch of Amateurs* is a zeitgeist film about our overriding need for contact and connection, regardless of actual age.

While talking about the isolation of our elders felt somewhat abstract and altruistic pre pandemic, these days isolation feels like something we all immediately understand and want to abate. *A Bunch of Amateurs* shows ageing warriors against isolation actively generating contagious collective activity and union, delighting in ingenuity and self-expression while building a glorious sense of belonging, never more pertinent than now.

Kim Hopkins, 2022

In her 1996 *New York Times* essay 'The Decay of Cinema', Susan Sontag wrote, 'If cinephilia is dead, then movies are dead too.' Director Kim Hopkins opens *A Bunch of Amateurs* with this quote, and her film is an affectionate portrait of the Bradford Movie Makers, a dozen lifelong cinephiles resolutely keeping the flame alive. Ominous signs are evident – from the creaking bodies of the club's more senior members to the clubhouse that is crumbling around them – but when it comes to the serious business of realising their DIY short films, the BMMs' infectious enthusiasm remains undimmed.

Hopkins has some fun with the filmmakers' attempts to emulate Hollywood spectacle on a shoestring budget, which leads to thorny questions such as how to recreate the opening scene of *Oklahoma!* (1955) when your lead actor is an 80-year-old Yorkshireman who's never been on a horse. But beyond the comedy value inherent in this concept, there's a note of poignancy when Harry, the octogenarian in question, reveals that his homage is for his now ailing wife Mary, as *Oklahoma!* was the first film they saw together. While *A Bunch of Amateurs* initially appears to fit neatly into the tradition of amusing studies of English eccentrics, it deepens into a touching reflection on the importance of cinema and community for an ageing population whose lives are too often isolated and lacking in purpose. The weekly meetings of the Bradford Movie Makers offer the club's members a human connection and respite from caring for the loved ones who are currently bedridden or struggling with dementia; one member tells us that being part of the group has helped him cope with bouts of depression. Sontag writes about cinephilia keeping cinema alive, but it's clear from *A Bunch of Amateurs* that cinema can also serve to sustain the cinephiles themselves.

The film can feel a little directionless as it shifts interest from one member to another, but Hopkins creates a narrative thread by focusing on the looming threat of extinction that the group faces. Similar collectives in Leeds and Wakefield have already folded, and the region's once-thriving amateur film community is dwindling into an ever smaller niche. With attempts to enlist younger members falling flat, there's a very real possibility that this club will die with its ageing membership. The Bradford Movie Makers celebrate their 90th anniversary this year, but how many years do they have left? We only know one thing for sure: they will make the most of every moment.

Philip Concannon, *Sight and Sound*, December 2022

A BUNCH OF AMATEURS

Director: Kim Hopkins

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a Labor of Love Films production

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Presented by: BFI Doc Society Fund

in association with: Screen Yorkshire

International Sales: Met Film Sales

Executive Producers: Lisa-Marie Russo, Caroline Cooper Charles, Simon Beaufoy, Capella Fahoome, Megan Gelstein

Produced by: Margareta Szabo, Kim Hopkins

Writer: Kim Hopkins

Cinematography: Kim Hopkins

Editor: Leah Marino

Graphic Design: Graphicon Industries

Colourist: Daniel Stuyck

Composer: Terence Dunn

Sound Recordist: Margareta Szabo

Re-recording Mixer: Tom Hammond

UK 2022©

95 mins

Courtesy of Republic Distribution

NEW RELEASES

Decision to Leave (Heojil Kyolshim)

From Mon 17 Oct

Triangle of Sadness

From Fri 28 Oct

The Greenaway Alphabet

From Fri 11 Nov

Aftersun

From Fri 18 Nov

What Do We See When We Look at the Sky?

(Ras vkhedavt, rodesac cas vukurebt?)

From Fri 25 Nov

RE-RELEASES

The Others

From Mon 17 Oct

Poltergeist

From Fri 21 Oct

Nil by Mouth

From Fri 4 Nov (Preview on Thu 20 Oct 20:20; extended intro by

Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large on Fri 4 Nov 17:50; intro by

Kieron Webb, Head of Conservation, BFI Archive on Mon 7 Nov 18:00)

The Draughtsman's Contract

From Fri 11 Nov (+ intro by Kieron Webb, Head of Conservation,

BFI National Archive on Fri 11 Nov 17:50)

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